

News

Better watch your back, Chris, here comes Daggett

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“Never look back. Something might be gaining on you.”

— *Satchell Paige*

Republican gubernatorial candidate Chris Christie might have the sensation that someone is creeping up behind him.

That someone is independent candidate Chris Daggett, who polled at 20 percent in a poll released yesterday by Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute. The institute suggested that Daggett is drawing votes mainly from Christie, and the benefits will be reaped by incumbent Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine.

The poll showed Corzine leading Christie by three points, which is still within the four-point-plus margin of error of the poll.

David Redlawsk, Eagleton's polling director, predicted that the ultimate outcome of the election would come down to who could mobilize the most voters on election day in what he called “the ground game.” “It's all about who's going to get out the vote,” he said. “This is all about driving the turnout.”

Regarding the close margin between Corzine and Christie, Redlawsk admitted that it was anyone's guess who could mobilize a deciding factor of voters on Nov. 3. “The numbers between Corzine and Christie are so close,” he said, “it's easy to play the ‘what-if’ game.” He said that the election could come down to one unforeseeable point one way or the other.

Redlawsk attributed Christie's downward slide from his previous polling numbers to an issue of recognition and campaigning. “It's an indication that there's a campaign going on,” he said. “In the early polling a large percent didn't even know who Christie was.” He added that Christie's early high polling numbers were a result of anti-Corzine sentiment, adding that Daggett was not yet a recognizable alternative.

As the campaign progressed towards election day and Daggett began to figure more prominently into voters' decisions, Christie's stance on issues and the possibility of a viable third candidate drove down Christie's polling numbers, according to Redlawsk.

Redlawsk acknowledged that a true base of support has materialized around Daggett, and that his numbers are not based entirely on dissatisfaction with the two partisan candidates. “He's a contender in his own right in the sense that there are people who would not vote if he were not on the ballot,” he said. “He's drawing voters who would otherwise not show up.”

Meanwhile, the best thing Corzine can do is let Daggett and Christie duke it out and try his best to stay out of the way, according to Redlawsk. “On the Corzine side this is the absolute best thing they can hope for,” he said. “His numbers are not going to go up a whole lot.”

Whether or not Corzine's polling numbers are going to rise, he has definitely been trying to energize possible base voters, hosting President Barack Obama, Vice President Joseph Biden and former President Bill Clinton.

Camp Christie is, by comparison, lacking in celebrity stump-thumpers. “The challenge that Christie faces is that the Republicans don't have the same kind of big guns right now,” said Redlawsk. He admitted that a recent visit to New Jersey by Republican Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal was helpful to Christie, but said that it “doesn't play the same role on the media side that bringing Obama and Bill Clinton has done.”